

Kenwood Isles Area Association

MPLS 2040 “Draft” Comprehensive Plan Response

July 13th, 2018

Introduction to Comments by the Kenwood Isles Area Association

The Kenwood Isles Area Association (KIAA) represents the neighborhood that extends between Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles, North and West of Kenwood Park, and south to the Kenilworth Channel.

We have 12 board members that are all well engaged in Minneapolis affairs, and we only first heard about Minneapolis 2040 Plan with the announcement of December 2017 open houses. While it is mentioned in the Draft Plan that neighborhood organizations are engaged, ours was not. We did not even hear of the draft plan release until March 2018, when an engaged constituent contacted us.

While we understand the city is making an effort to engage typically underrepresented organizations, traditional neighborhood organizations want to maintain past engagement levels, since aspects of the plan have a substantial impact on our neighborhood, our housing investments, and our unique assets such as the Kenilworth Corridor.

In May, along with EIRA, LHNA, and CIDNA, KIAA co-hosted an information session with City Planning and it is clear that there are far more concerns in our constituency than support for this plan.

We are not seeking to challenge the overall goals of the draft plan per se; rather we would like to provide balanced comment on what we see as the benefits and concerns of the draft.

While this is referred to by the City Planning Department as a “Draft,” we are now well aware that up to 2 years of planning and community engagement has happened already. While the City Planning office states that it has never said that density is a strategy to deliver more affordable housing, Mayor Jacob Frey had been vocal about this in his campaign strategy. We are concerned that there is already considerable ownership of the plan and our concerns will not affect change. This concern is further fueled by our past experiences with prior city leadership regarding Southwest Light Rail, where our concerns failed to gain any significant support of the prior Mayor or prior City Council. We are going to be watching for signs that our efforts to engage with feedback will be responded to with action, as promised at our recent Neighborhood Forum and as promised by Director of City Planning, Heather Worthington.

That said, as we are a neighborhood organization, we have decided to limit the scope of our response to those that directly impact our neighborhood and constituents.

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What We Like In Accordance with Our Published Neighborhood Priorities

Goal 11: Clean Environment

Protecting our Lakes and Environment is one of our five priorities. We support reasonable efforts to ensure that the water quality of Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles is protected and improved. We support the efforts to maintain a tree canopy in existing green spaces, such as the Kenilworth Corridor. We encourage incentives to homeowners and renters to save energy and improve the efficiencies of our existing housing stock, much of which has aged electrical, water, heating/cooling and insulating properties. We have funded and helped build Rain Gardens to prevent water runoff into our lakes as a tangible sign of our support of the environment.

Goal 7: History and Culture. Policy 96: Heritage Preservation

Within Kenwood, there are historic assets listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Historic Water Tower, the Kenilworth Channel, the Old Horse Fountain, at least three individual homes, the Kenwood Parkway Historic District, and the Grand Rounds. And in general, while not designated historic, efforts have been made to ensure that reconstruction within Kenwood fits its historic character. Many homes in Kenwood are 100 years old or more. We will support development that supports the cohesion of the neighborhood, and oppose development that is a detriment to these assets and the cohesion of the historic appearance of the neighborhood.

Topic: Parks and Open Space

Parks are an important asset within Kenwood, especially the Grand Rounds/Kenilworth Corridor, Kenwood Park, and the open spaces surrounding Lake of the Isles and Cedar Lake. It is a natural urban forest. Kenwood Parkway itself represents a greenway. We are not actively seeking more parks, but we do not want to see a lessening of green space or infringement on green space by allowing development that has an adverse effect on the green spaces we have. These assets serve not only the neighborhood, but are also regional parks that serve residents of the Greater Twin Cities.

Goal 14: Equitable Civic Participation

Thank you for reiterating the importance of neighborhood organizations, such as the neighborhood boards. They help improve resident's access to government. Neighborhood organizations such as KIAA are a grassroots way to gain an extra link of connectedness between residents and our elected officials, including our City Council Members, State Representatives, Park Board Commissioners and more. We are also responsible for ensuring that city funds that are directed towards our neighborhoods are used in accordance with established priorities that our constituents have vocalized.

Our board has on a regular basis openly welcomed all neighborhood residents to participate fully in our board either as a member, committee leader or as a volunteer.

For these reasons, we support continuing to include established neighborhood organizations within the city structure.

Goal 2: More Residents and Jobs. Policy 1: Access to Housing

We welcome additional residents within the Kenwood neighborhood. We are aware of the many multi-plexes that currently exist, and how those structures fit within current housing design and construction. We have supported Additional Dwelling Units. Homes have renovated garages as rental units, and some of the larger homes have been remodeled into multiplexes. These strategies have allowed more residential units while still protecting the overall neighborhood aesthetic.

Topics of Concern in Accordance with Our Published Neighborhood Priorities

Topic: Parks and Open Space

Minneapolis 2040 draft plan is currently suggesting Corridor 4 development within the Kenilworth Corridor. While we recognize that a blanket approach was taken to all transit corridors, we would like to strongly urge and remind city planners that the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding is in effect as it relates to Southwest Light Rail. In that MOU between the Met Council and the City, it clearly states that any land that is not used for the operation of freight and light rail in that corridor is to be returned to the people as public parkland. We strongly urge that this proposed zoning be removed from the draft plan since it is inconsistent with that agreement.

Goal 7: History and Culture. Policy 96: Heritage Preservation

Kenwood Parkway is eligible for designation as a historic district. KIAA would propose that it, the Grand Round and other eligible assets be officially treated as such, and the historic nature of the entire Kenwood neighborhood be recognized as well.

Because pending updates made the State's extensive database of studies maintained by the State Historic Preservation Office unavailable, we relied "Phase I/Phase II Architectural History Investigation for the Proposed Southwest Light Rail Transit Project Hennepin County, Minnesota Volume Five Supplemental Report/Number Two: Additional Areas/Properties in the Following Survey Zones: St Louis Park Survey Zone; Minneapolis West Residential Survey Zone". This is part of Appendix C of the Supplemental Draft EIS for SWLRT. There are historic assets within the neighborhood that are not covered within this report.

Implementing Corridor 4 anywhere in Kenwood would adversely affect this aspect of the neighborhood, as it would allow for the demolishing or infringement upon our heritage.

Goal 2: More Residents and Jobs. Policy 1: Access to Housing

KIAA supports access to housing across the city. We do not object to fourplexes and rental properties, and we are welcoming to the renters and multi unit rental owners in our neighborhood. That said, if there should be a situation where there were to be a dramatic uptick of reconstructed properties for the purpose of increasing rental units, we would urge the following be adopted to ensure that current residents' interests are protected:

1. Current standards where owners/management reside in the metro are maintained
2. Established setbacks and footprints that are in line with current housing stock
3. Established distances between homes
4. As already mentioned, no density beyond Interior 2, which will keep construction consistent with current housing stock in size and scale. Certainly, street width does not support Corridor 4 designation in Kenwood and 21st St in particular.
5. Streamlined approval processes for ADU in garages and secondary buildings
6. Resident' opinion is mixed on allowing 3 and 4 unit buildings where now only 1 and 2 unit buildings are permitted. If 3 and 4 unit buildings are allowed, current preservation guidelines, Shoreland regulations R-1, R1A, R2B, and C1 zoning district standards for setback, height, lot coverage, floor area ratio, etc. should remain in place. These have been carefully developed to ensure that new structures are compatible with the existing stock
7. Kenwood overall does not support 3 zoning designations; we suggest that no zoning area upzone more than one comparable category.

Policy 20: Transit

The draft plan calls for increasing the frequency, speed, and reliability of the public transit system. Policy 20 does not call for the addition of routes where they do not currently exist. Therefore, Franklin Avenue east of Penn Avenue is improperly identified for Corridor 4 Development, as it is not currently an active bus route.

Corridor designations assume transit so residents need not be automobile dependent. Route 25, the bus route that serves Kenwood, provides weekday rush hour service only. The four AM trips go downtown only; the four PM trips are from downtown only. It connects with no other bus route west of Hennepin Avenue. Appendix C - Bus Operations Plan (part of the SWLRT final EIS) states that if SWLRT is constructed the only changes to this route would be to route the bus on Thomas rather than Sheridan between 22nd and 24th and to eliminate the St. Louis Park portion of the route. This minimal route does not justify a corridor designation. But none of this is considered in the draft.

SWLRT will be useful to gain access to transit. However, even with the addition of SWLRT, transit service in Kenwood is scarce and not expected to grow. Most destinations will still require use of an automobile or ride share to cut total transportation time by up to 75%.

We suggest that this entire area (Franklin Ave, 21st St, Sheridan Ave) be redrafted at most as Interior 2, which not only would be more consistent with existing multiplexes in Kenwood, but also be more appropriate based on the frequency of bus service.

Lastly, as it relates to Franklin Avenue, we do not believe it to be appropriate to zone Corridor 4 *in anticipation* of increased service, which may or may not happen in the future.

Goal 5: Healthy Safe and Connected People. Policy 84: Public Safety

We would like to call attention again to the proposed Corridor 4 development around Kenwood School. We assert it to be inappropriate to dramatically increase housing, bus traffic, and car congestion in this area of the intersection of Penn Avenue and Franklin Avenue. It is already a very congested area with buses, cars, and pedestrians during peak school hours. We oppose increasing Metro Transit buses and density in this area, in order to maintain current levels of safety for school children.

Goal 11: Clean Environment

There are many rain gardens in the neighborhood that catch roof runoff. But most stormwater runoff comes from the streets, sidewalks, alleys, and driveways. Nearly all this runoff goes into a storm drain and is piped directly to a lake. It contains sediment, vegetative debris, chemicals, and trash. Twice-yearly street sweepings do not adequately address this problem. KIAA supports additional measures to clean this water. If current housing footprints are expanded, there will be a loss of green space, gardens, and rain gardens that today naturally absorb runoff and this runoff will feed into the Chain of Lakes. The loss of this green and garden space will also impede pollinators, trees, birds, and nature friendly codes. Plantings, rain gardens, and habitat need to be part of a comprehensive plan to protect the environmental ecosystem in the city.

We would also like to call to attention that Corridor 4 development would be in conflict with Ordinance 551.440 Shoreland Overlay District, designed to preserve and enhance the environmental qualities of surface waters and the natural values of shoreline areas, and to protect public health and safety. In this ordinance, the maximum height of all structures within the district is limited to 2.5 stories or 35 feet whichever is less. This height is intended to allow access to light and air of surrounding properties, limit shadowing of public spaces, be in scale and character of surrounding uses, and preserve the views of significant open spaces or water bodies. We urge that there be no Corridor 4 development per ordinance within 1000 feet of the high-water mark of Lake of the Isles, Cedar Lake, and the Kenilworth Channel.